

Under embargo Tues 2nd July 06:00

Expanded offer falls short in creating more places for families, new research shows.

Almost two thirds (59%) of early years settings, which have provided the new expanded offer to two year olds since April, have *not* been able to offer extra places, new research reveals. An [annual survey](#) of more than 550 early years educators* undertaken by Tapestry, the online learning platform and management system, also found that a similar number had not recruited more staff.

69% of respondents to the survey said they were providing the expanded offer, but the findings suggest that their provision was only available to *existing* families using the setting, with no extra places created for new families. As a result, the overall number of places available may not have increased - a concern that was highlighted ahead of the new offer launching**.

Encouragingly, more than half (54%) of respondents felt the first month of the expanded offer had gone well. However, a third (33%) also said they'd had to pass on extra costs to parents and two thirds (62%) said they'd needed to produce new information for families.

Comments from respondents highlight the challenges felt by settings. One respondent said: *"Staff are stretched, we are unable to recruit, and the parents aren't given enough info."* Another added: *"Funding rates are low and they do not cover the hourly rate, while everything else has increased."* And another revealed: *"Can't get staff working longer hours to cover."*

Worryingly, looking ahead to the expanded offer changes in September, more than half of respondents (54%) felt they were only partially prepared at best.

Advice for the next government

[The survey](#) asked respondents to give their views on what they felt the next government should include in their early years policies. Greater funding (89%) and more support for children with additional support needs (81%) were most popular options. Half (54%) felt a new government should include subsidised professional development qualifications for those pursuing a career in the early years. Dr Helen Edwards, co-founder of Tapestry and a former nursery owner, said:

“It is likely we will have a Labour government following the election, and I am encouraged that their manifesto talks about driving up quality – something close to every educator’s heart. However, it is also important that a new government understands that support for children with SEND needs to start in the early years, and our survey shows this is a priority, and one that needs funding.”

The survey also asked respondents about their views on the Labour party’s main policies (ahead of the election being called). More than four fifths (89%) felt that support for early language skills and identifying children who needed extra help sooner was ‘*very important*’. However, Labour’s manifesto makes it clear that it is primary schools, rather than early years settings, which will get support on early-language interventions***.

Group observations on the rise

[Tapestry’s survey](#) found that the number of group observations have increased, with a quarter of respondents reporting this. Dr Helen Edwards, co-founder of Tapestry and a former nursery owner, said: *“I’m interested to understand why group observations have increased, and what impact this might have on supporting parental engagement.”*

The way observations are captured continues to evolve, with a quarter (26%) of respondents reporting they had reduced the number of written/typed observations in the past year and a similar number (25%) reporting they had increased their use of photos and a fifth (21%) increasing their use of video.

Observations are also used for much more than capturing children’s development. Almost all respondents shared observations with parents and carers and half (55%) used them to consider how well provision supported their children. Encouragingly, near to half (45%) used observations to support their professional development.

Dr Edwards added: *“Talking with children about photos and videos in their online journals provide rich opportunities for their language development, as well as professional learning opportunities for staff, so it is great to see these visual observations have increased.”*

Half of respondents (52%) reported that the number of observations recorded in the last year had stayed about the same, but 24% said the number had increased, whilst 22% had seen a decrease.

For more information about the survey findings visit: <https://tapestry.info/ts24-five-things-we-learnt.html>

ENDS

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Notes to editors

*Survey responses were received between 9th May and 7th June 2024 and the survey was promoted by Tapestry, the Foundation Stage Forum, Nursery World and wider stakeholders. There were 569 responses from those working in the early years. Percentages have been rounded to nearest whole number.

**Coram Family and Childcare's 23rd survey published March 2024 highlighted a continued decrease in the availability of places in early years settings and nurseries.

<https://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/families-facing-growing-childcare-shortages-while-costs-rise-7>

***Labour Party Manifesto <https://labour.org.uk/change/break-down-barriers-to-opportunity/>

About Tapestry

Tapestry is the original, and leading, childhood education platform, providing an online learning journal and management system for early years settings and primary schools. It helps educators to celebrate children and engage families in mainstream and SEND provision. Tapestry keeps parents and carers in touch with how their child is doing, enables educators to build a picture of each child's development and interests, and provides the tools for the daily running of a setting.

Tapestry is used in more than 40 countries, and supports 15,000 schools and settings - more than any other platform. It was launched in 2012 by the edtech company Foundation Stage Forum and is based in Lewes, UK.

Tapestry is the brainchild of husband and wife team, technologist Steve Edwards and educator Dr Helen Edwards. Both regularly write and speak about education and technology, and they continue to support initiatives like the APPG for Childcare and Early Education.

Tapestry has been shortlisted for the Bett Awards and TeachPrimary Awards and most recently was ranked number 1 in Business Cloud's EdTech 50.

For more information visit: <https://tapestry.info>